On Pentecost: The Spirit's Coming

By Dan Wilt

What Is Pentecost All About? Over the course of the first few centuries of the Church, various Sundays began to take on a yearly meaning for celebration. With the goal to remember the whole of the Story of God's activity among humankind, a demarking of dates began to occur that spawned literally hundreds of ways of giving meaning to Sundays across Church history.

"How does the church express the spirituality of being with Christ in his incarnation, manifestation to the world, death, resurrection, ascension, and coming again? How can we as members of the church participate in a present spirituality that is rooted in past events and anticipates a future event? The answer to this question is that we are shaped and formed spiritually by Christ in the church through a worship that continually orders the pattern of our spirituality into a remembrance of God's saving deeds and the anticipation of the rule of God over all creation.

…The Christian year represents the historical unfolding of the life of Christ and his sure return. One may observe that Advent deals with the coming of Christ; Christmas, his birth; Epiphany, his manifestation to the Gentiles; Lent, his journey toward death; the Great Triduum, the last days of Jesus' earthly life; Easter, the time to celebrate his resurrection; and Pentecost, the time to experience life in the power of the Holy Spirit. According to this historical representation of the life of Christ, the Christian year begins with Advent and ends with Pentecost." (From Robert Webber's, Ancient-Future Time, p. 31)

The Christian Year

The Christian year is one way that Christians have, for millennia, revisited the life of Christ and the acts of the Church on a yearly basis. The Christian year officially begins with Advent, and ends with the celebration of the Holy Spirit's coming at Pentecost. Let's just say a few words about the meanings and stories focused on during each of these seasons of the Christian year.

To understand the place of Pentecost in the Church Year, we must first remember the place of Easter, which precedes it. Pentecost is the culminating celebration of the resurrection season of Easter.

Easter Leads To Pentecost

Easter is the great day of triumph – it is the ultimate yearly celebration of the Church. It affirms the saving event of Christ rising in the world, breaking the chains of sin and death and inviting us into the new creation, resurrection life of the age to come. Easter goes on for fifty days (approximately 6 total Sundays) and includes Ascension Day and the culminating joy of Pentecost Sunday. Easter is the central celebration of the Christian year, and is the greatest storytelling Sunday of them all.

Pentecost And After Pentecost

Pentecost, rooted in the ancient Jewish celebration of the giving of the five (penta) books of the Law (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy), is recognized as the birthday of the Church. The Acts 2 infilling in the upper room by the Holy Spirit is recalled, and the spread of the good news through a divinely empowered Church becomes the center of attention. This season leads us with the theme of the Spirit's great inspiration through the remainder of the year, until Advent begins the cycle over again.

The Gospels and Acts become a focus of reading and devotional reflection, and the Church recovers and reclaims her role in innovatively and compassionately catalyzing cultural change. The After Pentecost season then leads us through the acts of the empowered Church in society, healing the sick, showing compassion for the broken, and impacting culture. As Easter is a season that spans many weeks, the Church Year ends on the day of Pentecost, leading us into a season of missional focus as we prepare again for Advent.

Lent, Easter and Pentecost form the "Cycle Of Life" portion of the Christian Year (in contrast to Advent, Christmas and Epiphany being the "Cycle Of Light" portion). In this culminating day celebrating the outpouring of the Spirit on the Church, Christians globally for more than a millennium have remembered our call to be a Church that is continually empowered, regularly renewed, and ultimately missional in all that we say and do.

::

Bio: Dan Wilt, M.Min. is an author, communicator, and innovative voice in the fields of Worship and the Arts. He is the creator of the Essentials In Worship Video Training Course for worship leaders and teams, and is the Founder of the 35K member WorshipTraining.com. Dan serves as the Director of Communications & Resources for Vineyard USA, and his ancient-future worship leadership blog offers weekly tools and team encouragements at DanWilt.com.

Subscribe to his blog to receive tools and weekly insights.